

**Event focuses specifically on care for children of military families and recognizing specialty care at children's hospitals.**

August 21, 2009

Philadelphia, PA – As part of his effort to address quality health care for all Americans, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) joined representatives from The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), and other organizations with significant roles in providing health care to children of military families. Located in close proximity to a major military base, CHOP, like many other children's hospitals, supplies critical, high quality care for children of parents who have served our nation in the armed forces. Children's hospitals ensure that military families receive appropriate care for complex conditions. Attendees discussed ways to best ensure our service members' families receive this needed care.

"Children represent roughly 20 percent of the TRICARE population and specialty treatment provided by children's hospitals is critical to ensuring military families have quality health care," said Congressman Sestak. "When my 4-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a brain tumor while I was in the military, I was fortunate that TRICARE, the military health plan, offered her the opportunity to have exceptional care. I specifically thank the wonderful employees of children's hospitals in Philadelphia, and elsewhere, for their commitment to our military families."

Congressman Sestak has worked specifically to enhance children's coverage under TRICARE, specifically for the thousands of families dealing with autism. Under current law, the military's Extended Care Health Option provides limited coverage to military families afflicted by autism. Only five percent of eligible military children receive care because of excessive delays-- as long as two year waiting periods-- and arbitrary coverage denials. The amendment passed through the House by the Congressman in the National Defense Authorization Bill (NDAA) works to fix these problems by mandating coverage of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) under TRICARE and ensuring that beneficiaries under the age of 5 who have developmental delays and are at risk for Autism may not be denied access to treatment if treatment is medically necessary.

Last year, the Congressman was successful in placing an amendment into the House-passed version of the National Defense Authorization Act that enhanced funding and research for autism for military families by increasing it by 100 percent.

The Congressman entered politics as pay back for the health plan he received through the military and to work toward the same affordable, accessible, quality health care for all Americans. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee and founder of the Pediatric Cancer Caucus, the Congressman discussed the need for a continued successful relationship between children's hospitals and TRICARE, and to ensure these facilities are appropriately recognized for the care they provide.

He noted that in 2006, TRICARE spent \$430 million on hospital care for children, out of more than \$10 billion spent on other civilian care. Recognizing Children's Hospitals outstanding care of military families, the Congressman pointed out that TRICARE children treated at Children's Hospitals had significantly more complex cases than those treated at community hospitals and children's hospitals had longer average stays (6.1 days vs. 3.5 days) and more transfers from other hospitals (8.8% vs. 3.3%) than Community Hospitals.

Earlier this year, the Congressman announced the establishment of a new House Pediatric Cancer Caucus and, as someone who shared the experiences of many attending the event, expressed his hopes for the future of pediatric cancer research and treatment.

*□ Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including as Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University.□ According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*